

## Army Holds Off Late Navy Charge

By Alex Goff [Reprint and Copyright Info](#)

November 18, 2006 – Three second-half tries brought the U.S. Naval Academy within a shout of Army, but the U.S. Military Academy's 18-point lead was a large enough cushion for them to hold on in this annual fall rivalry clash.

In a thrilling game played in front of 1,500 fans at Annapolis, including the USNA Commandant and plenty of alumni, the two teams gave up nothing in a match that was, in terms of quality of play, commitment, and sportsmanship, of the highest order.

"All collegiate rugby teams should approach games the way these two teams came to play today," said Navy head coach Mike Flanagan.

Echoed Army head coach Rich Pohlidal, "this is what collegiate rugby should be."

Army dominated possession and territory in the first half, but even so points were very hard to come by.

"I was very happy with our defense," said Flanagan. "I felt we defended for about 35 minutes in that first half. I wasn't too happy with our offense, but our defense was great."

"We felt we controlled things and kept it in their end with the wind at our backs," said Army flyhalf and co-captain Andy Locke. "But we weren't too concerned about only getting 16 points. Navy was always going to be hard to score against."

Navy gave up a lot of penalties, chalked up, said captain Blake Lindsay, to the forwards' propensity for going into the rucks with their heads down, thus seeing them drive downward, and often on top of the ball and incurring a penalty. So while they defended hard, the penalties mounted up.

"We gave up so many penalties in our 22, it was like, here, have some points," said Lindsay.

Army fullback Brendan McCarthy made them pay with a penalty goal early, and then Army finally got a try as after some continued pressure and plenty of work from the forwards to recycle the ball, center Rob Small burst through the middle to score. Berger was forced outside by the Navy cover defense and, in what would be one of the themes of the day, the Middies ran back hard to make sure he didn't turn the corner and touch it down under the posts.

No conversion. 8-0 Army.

Again Army had to work for it to score, as flanker Jay Berger went over to make it 13-0. McCarthy added a penalty kick before Navy finally got on the board with a Wes Van Dorn penalty as time wound down. McCarthy missed another shot, keeping the score at 16-3.

"We knew what we had to do, we had to tidy it up," said Flanagan. "We weren't being careful with the ball and we knew we had to. Then what do you know, we're not careful again."

True enough, Navy opened what they hoped was a more steady second half with a mistake in their own end, as alert Army hooker Tom Fatula blocked a clearing kick and scored.

Navy shook it off and pounded their way back down to the Army line. The consistent pressure forced Army to commit a couple of penalties. And then, with Navy close in, Locke dove over the ruck to tackle the Navy scrumhalf. Locke thought he had the ball. He didn't, and Locke was sin-binned.

"That was a tough one for us to lose a player of that caliber at that position," said Pohlidal. "And Navy, because they are a good team made us pay."

"It was tough to go out and they scored right after," added Locke. "As the vice captain I need to stay on the field."

Navy produced one of the few clean breaks soon thereafter, with center Jordan Folger showing a clean pair of heels and he raced in to score.

McCarty answered with a score of his own to make it 26-8, with the Middies once again blocking off anything but the corner, but Navy now had breached the Army defense, and they kept at it.

"We may not have played smart rugby, but we played really hard," said Navy's Lindsay. "I think Army started out really well but we showed as much heart as anyone at the end of the game. I am really proud of the guys for what they did."

"Army played that first half at such incredible pace, I don't know if any team can play that for eighty minutes," added Flanagan. "But we have played a lot of tough teams this fall. We know how to keep playing for 80."

Twice Navy worked their way down close to the Army line, and twice they hit Lindsay with a pop pass off a ruck as he came storming up from depth. Twice Lindsay crashed through the stout Army defense for tries, and suddenly it was 26-18.

Army, which had ceded momentum in the form of tries but also with some substitutions which might have brought in fresh legs, but didn't do a whole lot of team continuity. Yet they held on.

"I think we picked it up in the final minutes," said Locke. "And overall we played well. You can't take anything away from Navy. They are a great team and played all the way to the end. Being able to say we beat Navy back at West Point, that's huge. We got letters from all over the world, from alumni and guys deployed telling us they're pulling for us and they're paying attention. This was huge."

"It was a great game," added Pohlidal. "We came out of it knowing there are some things we need to work on. But Navy is a great team well coached. There was no nasty stuff, just smart, serious athletes going at it as hard as they can. It's the way rugby should be."

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